

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000412

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR E, EB, CBED, EB/IFD AND EUR/SE  
DEPARTMENT PASS NSC FOR BRYZA  
USDOC FOR 4212/ITA/MAC/OEURA/CPD/DDEFALCO  
USDOE FOR CHARLES WASHINGTON  
TREASURY FOR OASIA - MILLS AND LEICHTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EPET](#) [ENRG](#) [EWWT](#) [SENV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKISH LPG TANKER SINKS WITH LITTLE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

REF: MARCH 14 LOVEJOY - GABRIELSON/OPS CENTER E-MAIL

[1](#)1. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Ankara.

[1](#)2. (U) A 138 ton Turkish tanker carrying seven tanks of LPG from Kartal on the Asian side of Istanbul to Zeytinburnu on the European side sank at approximately 22:00 March 12. Five tanks of LPG were retrieved intact with no leakage from the Bosphorus within six hours of the incident. The other two tanks, which had drifted far from the site of the accident due to winds and stormy weather, were recovered on the shore next to the European coastal road 30 hours after the accident, by 05:00 March 14, with minor leakage reported. No crew members were injured. As a result of the incident, the Bosphorus was closed from 22:45 March 12 to 22:00 March 13, when it reopened to traffic. The shore road on the European side was also closed to traffic during that period. March 14 Turkish press reports claim that if the tanks had exploded, hundreds could have been killed.

[1](#)3. (U) The General Director of Coastal Safety and Salvage, Habip Soluk, informed Consulate officials that the directorate is measuring the amount of leakage from the two tanks, but confirmed that the leakage is not of an amount that would be considered environmentally damaging. Soluk noted that there is a regulation that tankers carrying LPG (or other dangerous material) in the Istanbul area of the Bosphorus must travel only between midnight and 06:00, so the directorate is conducting an investigation into the incident, which occurred at 22:00.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: It is fortunate that this incident occurred without serious environmental damage. However, it is a reminder of Istanbul's vulnerability in the event of a Bosphorus shipping accident. The GOT has been credited for its handling of straits traffic over the past year after the implementation of the VTS electronic system, but clearly accidents can still happen. Basat Ozturk, MFA Head of the Maritime Affairs Department, speaking unofficially, advised Embassy officials March 10 that if there is ever a massive accident, public pressure will force the GOT to take radical measures to ban/radically reduce/control hazardous cargo transiting the straits, regardless of the regulations in the Montreaux Convention. President Sezer's coincidental approval March 13 of a tougher straits protection law barring passage to uninsured ships or those not meeting international environmental standards represents a key step by the GOT to prevent such an accident. End comment.

ARNETT